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EU Studies in the South Caucasus

Mariana BUDA, Maka KHVEDELIDZE

Abstract: *The main objective of the article is to examine the challenges of EU Studies in the South Caucasus in accordance with in the process of European integration as exiting political and geopolitical strategies of the region can be considered as the platform and a kind or “need assessment” for the development and successful implementation of the EU Studies. A particular attention is paid to the objectives of the institutions oriented to the development of the EU Studies.*

Key words: *European studies, South Caucasus, European Neighborhood Policy, Action Plan, development*

Geopolitical advantages and disadvantages

In the new reality very often the geographical and geopolitical strategies of the region can be identified as the key sources for the implementation of different objectives within the scope of political, economic, social, educational or cultural priorities. The South Caucasus is the example of the region reflecting the transparent reality on all he levels mentioned above.

The Caucasus or Caucasia is a geopolitical region located between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. The Caucasus is represented by the North Caucasus: *Russia (Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan, Adyghen, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachai-Cherkessia, North Ossetia, Krasnodar Krai, Stavropol Krai* and the South Caucasus (Transcaucasia): Georgia (including disputed Abkhazia, South Ossetia), Armenia, Azerbaijan (including disputed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic)

This is a transitional region between Europe and Asia, The South Caucasus contains three states that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union: Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Geographically, the region is populated by some fifteen million people, links the Caspian Sea basin to the Black Sea on an east-to-west axis, and is the juncture between the greater Middle East, Turkey and Iran, and the Russian Federation.

It is bounded by the Caucasus Mountains in the north, the frontier with Turkey and Iran in the south, and the Black and Caspian Seas in the west and east respectively.

Surrounded by the three regional powers Iran, Russia, and Turkey and located on the crossroads of Europe and Asia, the South Caucasus has also been at the center of post-cold war geopolitical rivalries. To a considerable extent, the significant oil and gas reserves in the Caspian Sea, specifically in the Azerbaijani sector, have amplified regional rivalries for political and economic influence in the region.

The conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh hang like the “Sword of Damocles” over the South Caucasus. They have drained the region politically, economically and emotionally.¹

South Caucasus territorial disputes (Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia) remain unresolved and keep hampering regional development and stability. Besides a peaceful resolution of these conflicts, challenges for the three countries are numerous: one of them is the consolidation of newly established democratic regimes with the needed completion of on-going reforms and the general improvement of governance conditions (fight against corruption, decentralization, transparency/ accountability, protection of human rights, etc.). Another important challenge is to introduce a more equitable distribution of the benefits from economic growth into economic policies (despite impressive growth rates, socioeconomic disparities remain a major problem). A better inclusion of vulnerable social groups in relation to various types of public services deserves further attention, especially insofar as internally displaced persons are concerned.²

The importance of the EU relationship differs significantly in each republic, leading to diverging stances on official EU integration strategies. Georgia has clearly chosen the path towards Euro- Atlantic integration, at the same time antagonizing Russia. Azerbaijan has so far maintained a relatively pragmatic foreign policy. While Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey are increasingly developing their economic ties (e.g Baku- Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline), Armenia remains isolated (two main borders closed) and strongly depends on Russia. Armenia currently does not view EU membership as a vital element of its foreign policy. The South Caucasian states have not yet become concrete candidates for EU membership, nor do they seem to have such prospects in the foreseeable future.³

For the United States, NATO and the EU, the South Caucasus is an area of opportunity, in terms of the exploitation of the region’s energy reserves and its geographic position. Both the United States and Europe actively promote the concept of regional cooperation, including security cooperation among the states of the South Caucasus.

Its particular importance to Europe and the USA is the most of the additional Caspian oil and gas outputs is likely to move westwards to European and Mediterranean markets, although some oil will move by tanker the giant US East Coast market.⁴

Delivery of the gas and oil originated in this region going towards Europe is an important factor contributing to the stability of the European gas and oil market:

¹ Lynch Dov, *The EU in the South Caucasus*, CONFERENCE “Abkhazia in the Context of Contemporary International Relations, Pitsunda, The Republic of Abkhazia: June 29 - July 1, 2004[<http://www.circassianworld.com/Lynch.html>]

² Caucasus Analytical Digest, No.5, 16 April, 2009

³ Hayrapetyan Grigor, Baghdasaryan Vardan, *Integration of European Higher Education System and Participation of Armenia in this process*, Centre of European Law and Integration [http://www.celi.am/eng/Portals/0/Documents/European_Higher_Education&RA_eng.pdf]

⁴ Alieva Leila (2006), *EU and South Caucasus*, Bertelsmann Group for Policy Research, [http://www.cap.lmu.de/download/2006/2006_Alieva.pdf]

The South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) (also: *Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum Pipeline*, *BTE pipeline* or *Shah-Deniz Pipeline*), running from the Sangachal terminal near Baku to the Georgian-Turkish border, is a key element in the gas exports system from the Caspian, which should be accompanied by the development of transportation systems through neighboring countries to the EU markets. In longer perspective South Caucasus Pipeline will supply Europe with Caspian natural gas through the planned Nabucco, Turkey-Greece and Greece-Italy pipelines.

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline is crude oil pipeline from the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli oil field in the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. It connects Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan; Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia; and Ceyhan, a port on the south-eastern Mediterranean coast of Turkey, hence its name.

The Baku-Supsa Pipeline (also known as the Western Route Export Pipeline and Western Early Oil Pipeline) is an 830 kilometers (520 mi) long oil pipeline, which runs from the Sangachal Terminal near Baku to the Supsa terminal in Georgia.

The Baku-Novorossiysk Pipeline (also known as the Northern Route Export Pipeline and Northern Early Oil Pipeline) is an 830 kilometres (520 mi) long oil pipeline, which runs from the Sangachal Terminal near Baku to the Novorossiysk terminal at the Black Sea coast in Russia. The Azerbaijani section of the pipeline is operated by the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) and the Russian section is operated by Transneft.⁵

EU Studies – key Indicator of European Integration?

Thus Caucasus is a “bridge” and “transit area” not only of the material goods, but is a conductor of the political and cultural influences. It can play a role of the promoter of understanding and dialogues between the East and the West. It proved to be capable of synthesizing, absorbing external influences and producing unique forms of modernization and Europeanization, which had a significant impact on the greater East.

Since the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the EU in January 2007, the South Caucasus has become a region of direct concern to the EU’s strategy in its wider neighbourhood.⁶ Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the three newly independent states of the South Caucasus – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia – have been considered the most strife-ridden regions on the European periphery. The European Union appeared on the South Caucasian scene in the early 1990s. From the outset, the EU promoted two kinds of security in the region: internal security, which is threatened by political tensions and separatist conflicts; and external security, which is influenced by geopolitical rivalries and strained relations among regional actors. To alleviate the situation, the EU has undertaken diplomatic efforts in conjunction with the UN, the OSCE, the Council of Europe (CoE) and NATO, as

⁵ 2008 research Assessment Exercise: the outcome, December 2008 Ref RAE 01/2008
[<http://submissions.rae.ac.uk/results/outstore/RAEOutcomeFull.pdf>]

⁶ *THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY: Challenges and Prospects*, edited by Graham Avery and Yvonne Nasshoven, Trans European Policy Studies Association 2008, Brussels
[<http://www.iir.cz/upload/CV/Kratochvil/TEPSA.kniha%20ENP.pdf>]

well as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and GUAM.¹ EU policy-makers have further realized that a coordination policy is needed with each of the principle regional powers. Most importantly, effective EU action regarding the South Caucasus and the Caspian basin depends on the level of coordination it achieves with Russia, Iran, Turkey and the United States.

Existing political and geopolitical environment gives the birth to the necessity of the development of European studies in the South Caucasus.⁷ As universities are the key institutions for the development of the “healthy mind” in the new reality of the world, they create the platform for the knowledge expansion being vitally important on the national and international levels.

The highly competitive reality in the South Caucasus highlights the implementation of the European Studies reflecting the strategic ambitions of the region among the international players around the world. The process of getting closer to Europe is identified within the European integration process.

European integration is a positive and major feature of the new governments’ foreign and economic policies. *Europeanization* of the South Caucasus is yet at an initial stage, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and ENP Action Plan (ENAP) marked a new approach for the South Caucasus countries.

Whereas the EU is by far South Caucasus countries’ first economic partner, knowledge about The EU and its integration process, as well as the understanding of the meaning of the integration process between the EU and the South Caucasus Counties , of PCA (Partnership and Cooperation Agreement) and ENP, are still very low in the country. This makes the training capacities in European studies in the country not only a crucial need, but also a strategic issue.

The development of European Studies, as a new academic field in the South Caucasus region is not only a tool for a better understanding of the European Neighbour and of EU matters. It is also a major contribution to the building of competencies which are critical for efficient democracy and economy.⁸

The successful and rapid progression of the European integration process has increased the need for comprehensive expertise in European affairs at all levels of the government and in the private sector. Implementation of different EU projects highlights the pivotal role of the European Studies priority being the result of the region’s overall European approach. *Institute for European Studies (IES) at Ivane Javakhishvili_Tbilisi State University*

⁷ Smith Mike, *Chair of the European Studies Sub-Panel, The UK, Exchanging the Ideas on Europe*, RAE08: The Outcome for European Studies. Issue No 59, UACES NEWS, March 2009–June 2009 [<http://www.uaces.org/pdf/newsletter/n59p1.pdf>]

⁸ *The role of the European Union in the South Caucasus*, European Breakfast with Vytautas Landsbergis Euro MP, Group of the European People's Party and European Democrats, Vice-President of the Delegation in the EU-Armenia, EU-Azerbaijan and EU-Georgia Parliamentary Cooperation Committees 5 December, 2008 . Centre for International Relations and Development Studies [http://www.cidob.org/en/news/europe/the_role_of_the_european_union_in_the_south_caucasus]

(TSU),⁹ together with Batumi State University¹⁰ and Telavi State University¹¹. The IES delivers a MA degree in European studies (MAES), elective courses in other faculties and is a hub of distance teaching for regional universities. It also offers lifelong teaching in European Studies for different target groups. Planned outputs:

- A national higher education consortium of IES with its hub at TSU;
- Enhanced facilities at TSU and regional institutions to develop, implement and support courses in ES and knowledge about Europe;
- Learning programs enabling individuals to function more effectively in public and private sector employment;
- Staff adequately trained in student-centered approaches to teaching and learning, transparent recruitment, and assessment in line with European quality insurance methodologies;
- Greater awareness by the university and potential employers of graduates of the benefits to be gained from student-centered/demand-led courses.

The Institute for European Studies is strongly linked to the four TSU involved the faculties: Faculty of Economics and Management, Faculty of Humanities, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Political and Social Sciences.

The objectives of the *Institute for European Studies (IES)* definitely specifies the European approach as the main academic indicator in search of the European integration process. Examining the curricula of the academic programs of the institute, the priority can be given to the legal aspects of the EU activities, most probably creating the profound background for the general legal understanding of the EU policies for the country being on the threshold of the democratic challenges. The IES definitely changes the framework of the “academic background” and the “political observation” on the university level and it will not be too much to say that on the civil society level, considering the fact that the university is the beam of the society dedicated to the respect of the democratic values. The centre highlights the strategic changement necessity on the university level with the leading priorities observing the overall reality in the country; and on the base of the long-term academic research the network of this new initiative gives the rise to the birth of the healthy over viewing approach in close collaboration with the European universities, as their experience and, most importantly, their evaluation strategy answers the questions being displayed towards Georgia in the new “European Agenda” of Georgia.¹²

⁹ <http://www.ies.tsu.ge/index.php?act=project>

¹⁰ <http://www.university-directory.eu/Georgia/Batumi-State-University-BSU.html>

¹¹ <http://www.university-directory.eu/Georgia/Telavi-State-University.html>

¹² Hayrapetyan Grigor, Baghdasaryan Vardan, *Integration of European Higher Education System and Participation of Armenia in this process, Centre of European Law and Integration* [http://www.celi.am/eng/Portals/0/Documents/European_Higher_Education&RA_eng.pdf]

The Centre for European Law and Integration at Yerevan State University (Armenia)¹³ is aimed at different objectives that mainly cover the following areas:

- Interdisciplinary research in European Law, Economics and Politics
- Organizing Europe-related academic workshops, conferences, seminars
- Gateway to and from academic institutions outside YSU (other Centers in the region as well as in universities in the EU)
- Services to the public (e.g. training courses, public lectures)
- Implementation of MA Program on European Studies

Existing interdisciplinary studies programs offer students the possibility to analyze the process of European integration beyond disciplinary boundaries and to gain extensive knowledge in some of these aspects. Student-oriented strategy is the following:

- advanced knowledge of the European Union in its legal, economic and political dimensions
- deep understanding of the history and political systems of the Western, Central and Eastern European countries, as well as political and economical transformation processes that are taking place in the region;
- skills and knowledge to discern the factors that influence the making of domestic and foreign policies in the states of Eastern and Central Europe;
- skills to analyse the development of the region in the context of contemporary international and regional cooperation;
- methodological skills to undertake and produce an independent research project.

The transition process of Armenia vis-à-vis “europenaisation” and “russification” characterizes the specific curricula background. The centre mainly promotes the actions and the long-term objectives of the EU-oriented society in Armenia. But it should be mentioned that the pragmatic political reality specifies the significant role of Russia and the Russian-oriented ideological coexistence. The centre examines the advantages and disadvantages of “double” orientation approach and divergency between these two approaches can be explained within the academic programs underlining the much more “profitable future” of Armenia in alliance with the EU.¹⁴

The priorities identified for the South Caucasus Countries in the European Neighborhood Policy Action Plans are reflected within the leading fields of European studies; namely *EU Law*, *European Law*, *EU Economic Studies*. In this case European Neighborhood

¹³ <http://www.ysugu.am/web/>

¹⁴ Yilmaz Fatma, *The EU and Isolating Armenia*, Journal of Turkish Weekly, Turkey 23/3/2007 [<http://www.gab-ibn.com/IMG/pdf/Ar8- The EU and Isolating Armenia.pdf>]

Policy Action Plans can be characterized as the “needs assessment” for the development of the EU Studies.

ENP AC Priorities:¹⁵

Azerbaijan

- Contribute to the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict SIMILAR LANGUAGE TO ARMENIA PRIORITY 7
- Strengthen democracy in the country, including through fair and transparent electoral process, in line with international requirements
- Strengthen protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in compliance with the international commitments of Azerbaijan (PCA, CoE, OSCE, UN)
- Further convergence of economic legislation and administrative practices
- Enhancement of cooperation in the field of justice freedom and security; including in the field of border managements

Armenia

- Strengthening of democratic structures, rule of law, including reform of the judiciary and combat of fraud and corruption.
- Strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, in compliance with the international commitments of Armenia (PCA, CoE, OSCE, UN)
- Encourage further economic development, enhance poverty reduction efforts and social cohesion, thereby contributing to the long-term objective of sustainable development, including the protection of the environment
- Further conversion of economic legislation and administrative practices
- Contribute to the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Georgia

- Strengthen rule of law through reform of the judicial system, including the penitentiary system, and through rebuilding state institutions. Strengthen democratic institutions and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in compliance with the international commitments of Georgia (PCA, CoE, OSCE, UN)

¹⁵ *Analysis of European Neighborhood Policy (ENP Action Plans for South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia)*, http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00003063/01/Analyses_of_European_Neghbourhood_Policy.pdf

-Encourage economic development and enhance poverty reduction efforts and social cohesion, promote sustainable development including the protection of the environment, further conversion of economic and administrative practices

-Enhance cooperation in the field of justice freedom and security including in the field of border management.

Thus *Democracy, human rights, international law and market economy* principles are the essential elements on which the EU-South Caucasus partnership is based.¹⁶

European Studies provide valuable competencies for teaching, conducting independent research, or considering a career in:

-Public sector and governmental agencies

-NGOs, international organizations and European institutions

-Political organizations

-Business and other private sector

-Advisory organization

-Media and information centres

Existing centers represent important think-tanks in the field of European Studies and active players in the field of legal approximation and European Neighborhood Policy monitoring process. It will provide high quality information, knowledge and education on European Integration to academics, policymakers, civil servants and other interested parties.¹⁷

The centers' objectives entail the following:

-Development of comprehensive information databases (of books, working papers, portals, EU official documentation, statistics etc) to be provided to all interested persons for free.

-Coordinate, initiate and undertake academic research carried out in the field of European Studies

-Create a network of EU-related researchers the aim of involving them in various projects initiated by the Centre and its counterparts in the field of European integration studies

-Support introduction of courses in different fields of European studies at the universities alongside with the consortium members

¹⁶ Nuriyev Elkhan , *EU Policy in the South Caucasus, A view from Azerbaijan*, CEPS Working Document No. 272/July 2007 [<http://aei.pitt.edu/7544/01/272.pdf>]

¹⁷ *Analysis of European Neighborhood Policy (ENP Action Plans for South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia)* [http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00003063/01/Analyses_of_European_Neighbourhood_Policy.pdf]

-Participate in legal approximation process through drafting and expertise of national legislation in cooperation with concerned authorities and stakeholders.

-Implementation of joint projects with recognized European Universities and think-tanks

Conclusion

Regarding the fact that the EU is one of the strategic partners for the South Caucasus within the scope of economic, educational and political issues, general knowledge about the EU, European integration process seem to be of crucial importance. Thus training capacities in the European studies is a crucial need and a strategic issue. Successful European integration process of the region apparently increased the need for the consequent experience in the EU affairs in all the sectors. Existing geopolitical environment has been reflected within the EU Studies highlighting the main priorities of the region in collaboration with the EU. The centers of European studies, being the pivotal think-tanks in the field of European studies, emphasize the main priorities and objectives oriented towards the better understanding of the EU identify and mutually beneficial linkages.

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